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Unpacking the Bureaucratic Representation–Legitimacy Relationship in International Organizations: The Role of Elite Beliefs and Self-Legitimation Practices

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The link between bureaucratic representation and the perceived legitimacy of international organizations (IOs) is often cited in the literature. However, we do not know exactly how this works empirically. In this article, I introduce two variables to better understand the bureaucratic representation–IO legitimacy relationship: elite beliefs about geographical representation and self-legitimation practices. The theoretical framework bridges the literature on IO legitimacy in international relations and the literature on representative bureaucracy in public administration. Based on the case of the United Nations Secretariat and semistructured interviews with staff members, human resources experts, and member state representatives, the qualitative analysis points to two conclusions. First, this article presents the various representative bureaucracy–related legitimation practices employed by the bureaucracy at the discursive, institutional, and behavioral levels. Second, bureaucratic representation is perceived as a democratic, fair, and technocratic source of legitimacy by member state representatives. This article adds to the empirical study of IO legitimacy and to recent studies on representative bureaucracy in IOs.

Le lien entre représentation bureaucratique et légitimité perçue des organisations internationales (OI) est souvent mentionné dans la littérature. Cependant, nous ne savons pas exactement comment il fonctionne de façon empirique. Dans le présent article, je présente deux variables qui permettent de mieux comprendre la relation entre représentation bureaucratique et légitimité des OI: l'opinion des élites concernant la représentation géographique et les pratiques d'autolégitimation. Le cadre théorique fait le lien entre la littérature sur la légitimité des OI en relations internationales et celle sur la bureaucratie représentative en administration publique. En se basant sur le cas du Secrétariat des Nations Unies et des entretiens semi-structurés des membres du personnel, d'experts en ressources humaines et des représentants des États membres, l'analyse qualitative indique deux conclusions. D'abord, cet article présente les différentes pratiques de légitimation relative à la bureaucratie représentative employées par la bureaucratie aux niveaux discursif, institutionnel et comportemental. Ensuite, la représentation bureaucratique est perçue comme une source démocratique, juste et technocratique de légitimité par les représentants des États membres. Cet article vient compléter l'étude empirique de la légitimité des OI et les études récentes sur la bureaucratie représentative dans les OIs.

La correlación entre la representación burocrática y la percepción de la legitimidad de las organizaciones internacionales se cita a menudo en la literatura. Sin embargo, no sabemos exactamente cómo funciona a nivel empírico. En este artículo, introducimos dos variables para comprender mejor la relación representación burocrática y la legitimidad de las organizaciones internacionales: las percepciones de las élites sobre la representación geográfica y las prácticas de autolegitimación. El marco teórico tiende un puente entre la literatura sobre la legitimidad de las organizaciones internacionales en las relaciones internacionales y la literatura sobre la burocracia representativa en la administración pública. Tomando como base tanto el caso de la Secretaría General de las Naciones Unidas como entrevistas semiestructuradas con funcionarios, especialistas en recursos humanos y representantes de los Estados miembros, el análisis cualitativo apunta a dos conclusiones. En primer lugar, este artículo presenta las diversas prácticas representativas de la legitimación relacionadas con la burocracia, empleadas por esta a nivel discursivo, institucional y comportamental. En segundo lugar, los representantes de los Estados miembros perciben la representación burocrática como una fuente de legitimidad democrática, justa y tecnocrática. Este artículo se suma al estudio empírico de la legitimidad de las organizaciones internacionales y a los recientes estudios sobre la burocracia representativa en las organizaciones internacionales.

Introduction

It is not major news for international relations (IR) scholars to say that member states care about having their nationals among the staff of international organizations (IOs), especially at the most senior-level positions. Several scholars have described the extraordinary politicization of recruitment in these international bodies (Bulkeley 1989; David 2008; Kleine 2013). In making sense of this phenomenon, existing studies share the following theoretical premise rooted in the principal–agent model: since states delegate power to international bureaucracies, they still want to control the agent, and having a share of administrative power is a way to prevent agency slack. These studies point out the material benefits, such as information and influence, that states can gain by having their nationals among IO staff (Stone 2011; Parízek 2017; Novosad and Werker 2019).

However, power is not the only narrative that lies behind IO staffing. Scholars have demonstrated that functional and legitimacy considerations also play a role. For instance, IOs need to have nationals from the low-income countries where they conduct their operational activities in order to bring "soft information" within the bureaucracy (Parízek 2017). Second, scholars have pointed out that staff composition is also driven by the need to be representative of IO membership (Gravier 2013; Badache 2020; Parizek and Stephen 2021). These studies put forward that bureaucratic representation (i.e., the representation of member states in IO staff) is fostered by international bureaucracies in order to enhance their perceived legitimacy among member states'

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political elites.[1] But how exactly does the relationship between bureaucratic representation and perceived legitimacy play out in the IO context? Variables such as an internal bureaucratic feature—bureaucratic representation—and outcomes such as perceived legitimacy appear to be very distant and the relationship between the two seems to be unclear and unobservable directly at the empirical level.[2] Existing literature falls short in explaining the mechanisms through which this effect can happen.

In this article, I introduce two variables to unpack the bureaucratic representation–IO legitimacy relationship. First, I argue that we should look at the beliefs of member states' elites regarding bureaucratic representation. By "member states' elites," I refer to people holding leading positions in member states' foreign ministries or/and diplomacy (for a broader definition, see Dellmuth et al. 2022). These individuals are the ones who represent their country in United Nations (UN) decision-making bodies or who are in charge of "UN affairs" in foreign ministries. They interact daily with the UN and take decisions related to their country's position on the multilateral stage. Existing studies on representative bureaucracy in IOs have mostly relied on the analysis of organizational documents and statistics (Gravier 2008, 2013; Badache 2020; Gravier and Roth 2020). To my knowledge, no studies have collected the views of concerned individuals (i.e., IO staff and diplomats) on the topic of bureaucratic representation.[3] In the end, how we can assert that bureaucratic representation affects legitimacy beliefs if we do not look into what relevant audiences think of bureaucratic representation?

The second variable I believe we should look at is the self-legitimation practices employed by the bureaucracy, that is, "where actors deliberately seek to make a political institution more legitimate, by boosting beliefs that its rule is exerciser appropriately" (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 585). Studies in public administration have not examined the role the bureaucracy plays in fostering legitimacy among member states by relying on the "bureaucratic representation register." Most of the time, these studies look at bureaucratic representation as if it happens in a vacuum. On the contrary, in line with the sociological approach to legitimacy (Tallberg, Bäckstrand, and Scholte 2018b), I argue that the bureaucratic representation–perceived legitimacy relationship occurs in a social context and is co-constituted through an interaction between the organization and its audiences.

At the theoretical level, I build on and bridge various literature strands in IR and public administration. On the one hand, I bring the literature on IO legitimacy and legitimation in IR into the study of representative bureaucracy in IOs. Building on various theoretical perspectives and disciplines, IR scholars have recently made considerable efforts to theorize the sources of IO legitimacy and legitimation processes beyond the state (Zaum 2013b; Tallberg, Bäckstrand, and Scholte 2018b; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Bexell, Jönsson, and Uhlin 2022). On the other hand, I draw on the representative bureaucracy theory to derive a source of perceived legitimacy for the administrative component of IOs specifically. Representative bureaucracy is a body of literature that focuses on the sociodemographic composition of public workforce. The founding postulate is that public organizations' employees (i.e., teachers, police forces, and government employees) hold values and beliefs derived from their diverse socialization experiences that may lead them to act in favor of the social group they belong to. In a consequence, a broad range of interests will be represented if bureaucracies' workforces are representative, and organizations will therefore be more responsive to the general population. Representative bureaucracy is thus expected to promote public sector performance and make bureaucracies more legitimate.

Empirically, this article provides the first qualitative analysis of the link between bureaucratic representation and perceived legitimacy in the IO setting. The analysis builds on forty-six semistructured interviews with member state representatives, staff members, and human resources (HR) experts of the UN Secretariat. My empirical demonstration is two-fold. First, I present the various self-legitimation practices employed by the organization's management and staff members in relation to bureaucratic representation. Second, the analysis describes elite beliefs about bureaucratic representation. In sum, this article provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of UN insiders' views (member state representatives, staff members, HR experts) on bureaucratic representativeness as a source of perceived legitimacy and the related legitimation practices employed by the bureaucracy.

As a whole, this article allows to better understand "how the relationship between legitimacy and bureaucratic representation work (. . .) in polities like international or regional organizations that are not states but have big bureaucracies" (Gravier and Roth 2020, 16). It contributes more precisely to four literature streams. First, it complements previous studies on IO staff composition that have mainly been quantitative. This article sheds light on the perceptions actors have on an important staffing issue in IOs. Second, it adds to the study of the narratives and practices of legitimation used by IOs (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018; Dingwerth, Schmidtke, and Weise 2020; von Billerbeck 2020). Third, I contribute to IO legitimacy's empirical research by focusing on an overlooked dimension "administrative legitimacy" (Murdoch, Connolly, and Kassim 2018). Fourth, it also contributes to the emerging literature on representative bureaucracy in IOs.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. In the next two sections, I review the bodies of literature this article speaks to: on the sources of legitimacy for international bureaucracy on the one hand and on representative bureaucracy in the context of IOs on the other. Then, I present the theoretical framework used. The fourth section discusses the case of the UN Secretariat and the methodology adopted. The fifth and sixth sections present the empirical findings. The final part of the article provides a conclusion and discusses future research avenues.

Institutional Sources of Legitimacy for International Bureaucracies

On what basis do actors assess the legitimacy of global governance institutions? What factors determine their legitimacy beliefs? In early research on IO legitimacy, scholars distinguished between legitimacy derived from the qualities of their procedures (input legitimacy) and legiti-

[1] This article focuses on political elites as audiences of legitimacy. The link between citizens' beliefs and geographical representation is not univocal in the literature. For instance, Christensen (2020, 415) says that "international organizations seek to strengthen legitimacy and credibility with citizens by ensuring equal access to administrative jobs for citizens from all member states." Gravier (2013, 820) qualifies bureaucratic representation as an "instrument of legitimacy in heterogeneous or multinational polities" but argues—contrary to Christensen—that it "(. . .) probably cannot operate as a legitimacy enhancer vis-à-vis citizens even though it potentially does vis-à-vis member states" (Gravier 2013, 833).

[2] This approach has been inspired by Hurd (2008) in his study on the legitimacy of the Security Council.

[3] For an exception, see Murdoch, Gravier, and Gänzle's (2021) study on bureaucratic representation in Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

macy derived from their performance (output legitimacy) (Scharpf 1970). Later, Schmidt conceptualized the concept of "throughput legitimacy" to assess how the governance processes work in terms of accountability, openness, and inclusiveness (Schmidt 2013).

More recently, several scholars have argued the need to go beyond these categories of input, output, and throughput legitimacy and provided a typology that distinguishes between institutional sources (procedure and performance) according to two qualities: democratic and purposiveness (Dellmuth, Scholte, and Tallberg 2019; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Their argument is that the dichotomy of "procedure versus performance" does not allow us to capture the variety of potential sources. In addition, they note that, in the literature, democracy is often equated with procedure and performance with effectiveness, whereas "democracy and effectiveness could be qualities of both procedure and performance" (Scholte and Tallberg 2018, 60). For instance, democracy could also be a quality of IO outputs, and IO procedures could be assessed according to the criterion of effectiveness. The analytical advantage of this typology is that it encompasses a large array of potential sources of legitimacy beyond the usual input and output categories.

For instance, in terms of democratic procedures, scholars have examined whether the participation of various stakeholders (civil society organizations) would increase perceived legitimacy (Agné, Dellmuth, and Tallberg 2015). Interestingly, they found that such participation has no effect on the legitimacy beliefs of stakeholders themselves. In the case of the Security Council, scholars found that the council's perceived illegitimacy in the eyes of member states was mostly driven by procedural shortcomings, and its lack of performance came in second (Binder and Heupel 2015). Regarding technocratic procedures, research has shown that citizens' perceptions of the problem-solving capacity of IOs is a strong source of legitimacy (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015).

However, this literature has some shortcomings. With the exception of studies on the UN Security Council, previous studies on IO legitimacy have treated IOs as black boxes without differentiating between the multilateral and bureaucratic parts of IOs. This undifferentiated approach could lead to two potential limitations in our understanding of IO legitimacy. First, at the empirical level, previous studies may have suffered from measurement inaccuracies in legitimacy beliefs because political elites may hold different beliefs toward the various components of IOs. The action of the Secretariat may not be judged in the same way and on the same normative grounds as the action of IO intergovernmental bodies, for instance. It may be possible to extrapolate beliefs about one part of an IO to the organization as a whole, but this should be verified empirically. Second, at the theoretical level, previous studies may have overlooked other sources of legitimacy that may be specific to bureaucracies.

In their path-breaking work, Barnett and Finnemore noted that: "The power of IOs, and bureaucracies generally, is that they present themselves as impersonal, technocratic, and neutral—as not exercising power but instead as serving others; the presentation and acceptance of these claims is critical to their legitimacy and authority" (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 708). Barnett and Finnemore emphasized the need to be *perceived* as impersonal, technocratic, and neutral for IOs. But how and from what sources can international bureaucracies derive these characteristics? Part of the answer can be found in the emerging literature on depoliticization processes in global governance (Stone 2017; Louis and Maertens 2021). This body of research shows that depoliticization is central to secure legitimacy (Louis and Maertens 2021). And IOs employ various tactics to appear neutral such as emphasizing their technical expertise (Littoz-Monnet 2017) and relying on universal values (Pouliot and Thérien 2018). Using public administration literature, the present article adds to the study of the sources of legitimacy for international bureaucracies.

Representative Bureaucracy and International Organizations

Representative bureaucracy is a core theory in public administration. It developed in the mid-twentieth century to respond to various social, political, and administrative challenges (Groeneveld and Van de Walle 2010). In particular, the development of bureaucratic systems and the increased role of nonelected public servants in shaping and implementing public policy have raised questions about administrative legitimacy and responsiveness. The theory of representative bureaucracy is mainly structured around the concepts of passive and active representation. Passive representation (also labeled descriptive representation) "concerns the origin of individuals and the degree to which, collectively, they mirror the whole society" (Mosher 1968, 15). Active representation is the process "wherein individuals are expected to press for the interests and desires of those whom they are presumed to represent whether they be the whole people or some segment of the people" (Mosher 1968, 14). The large majority of published studies (more than 70 percent) have looked at the transition from passive to active representation (Bishu and Kennedy 2020). These studies ask: does increased minority representation in public organization workforces (passive representation) lead to improved outputs and outcomes for minority groups? Decades of research in different settings have provided mixed findings regarding active representation.

More recently, scholars have focused on what has been named "symbolic representation." This research strand looks at the effect of passive representation on citizens' beliefs and attitudes without any action taken by bureaucrats (Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017). For instance, in the police setting, scholars found that female victims are more likely to report sexual assaults when there are more female police officers (Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006) and police forces are perceived as more legitimate by black citizens when there are more black officers (Theobald and Haider-Markel 2009). These studies show that passive representation can produce a sense of trust and legitimacy among citizens (Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017).

Recently, some scholars have started to apply the theory of representative bureaucracy to international and supranational bureaucracies. They have justified the use of this theory by noting that concerns about bureaucratic representation play an important role in the staffing policies of supranational organizations. Furthermore, the use of this theory "makes it possible to grasp the question of nationality in an interesting manner" (Gravier 2008, 1026). Gravier was the first to apply the representative bureaucracy theory to understand staffing policies in the European Commission. In her case study of the 2004 enlargement policy, she showed that this policy deliberately aimed at matching the criteria of passive representation, that is, "at transforming the composition of the EU's civil service so as to reflect the EU's new demographic composition" (Gravier 2008). It did so in two ways. First, this staff policy derogated to staff regulations by opening the way to special recruitment competitions opened only to the nationals of the ten new member states. Second, the policy introduced objective (and indicative) criteria of representation for each member state based on a mathematical formula that takes into account the population level, the weighting of the votes in the Council, and the number of seats in the European parliament for each member state. In a second article, Gravier argued that the concept of bureaucratic representation applies not only to the 2004 enlargement staff policy but also to the Commission's overall staffing policy. She further explained that, in addition to enhancing its legitimacy, the representation of member states in the EC staff could also play a functional role that she named *linkage representation* (Gravier 2013). Since active representation, that is, furthering the interest of their state of origin, is forbidden by staff regulations in IOs, international bureaucrats may serve as a link between their organization and their country of origin.

In the context of the European Commission, Christensen et al. examined the relationship between concerns about geographical representation and specialized expertise in recruitment competitions from 1958 to 2015 (Christensen, van den Bekerom, and van der Voet 2017). Their study showed that when geographical representativeness is taken into account (i.e., in specific enlargement competitions), there is less emphasis on specialist expertise. According to the authors, recruitments have become more generalist because of the need to integrate individuals from new member states.

Based on Gravier's concept of linkage representation, Eckhard conceptualizes the concept of "knowledge linkage" through which "bureaucrats—who possess advanced knowledge about a social environment which is affected by policy—share information and broker relations between their organization and that environment" (Eckhard 2021, 296). He proposed four mechanisms through which knowledge linkage can affect bureaucratic decision-making: (1) bureaucrats can gather information about local context; (2) provide information from the bureaucracy to citizens; (3) bureaucrats can mitigate their colleagues' behaviors; and (4) access of citizens to the bureaucracy can be facilitated. He illustrated these mechanisms using the case of local staff in peacekeeping missions.

The potential role of representative bureaucracy in IOs has been summarized in three "representational bargains" (Christensen 2020). First, geographic representation can provide IOs with political support from member states' elites by allowing them to have a share of administrative power. Second, bureaucratic representativeness can also be a source of legitimacy by presenting itself as offering equal employment opportunities to citizens from all member states. Third, by bringing more diversity in the bureaucratic staff, representative bureaucracy can positively impact performance.

Theoretical Framework

As the previous section shows, scholars have already theorized the representative bureaucracy–legitimacy relationship in the IO context (Gravier 2013; Christensen 2020). The conceptual framework developed in this article aims to make two theoretical advancements to the study of the representative bureaucracy–legitimacy relationship: first, I mobilize the literature on IO legitimacy in IR—which previous studies did not consider—in order to go further in the specification of the relationship, and second I introduce the role of legitimation practices employed by the bureaucracy.

Member States' Elites' Beliefs about Bureaucratic Representation

This article uses a sociological approach to legitimacy defined as "the beliefs within a given constituency or other relevant audience that a political institution's exercise of authority is appropriate" (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 585). Perceived legitimacy is said to be as important as normative legitimacy because "in a democratic era, multilateral institutions will only thrive if they are *viewed* as legitimate by democratic publics" (Buchanan and Keohane 2006, 407).

In this article, I conceptualize bureaucratic representation as a source of perceived legitimacy for IO bureaucracies. In particular, I argue that it has three qualities that can generate legitimacy among member states' political elites: it is democratic, technocratic, and fair. The problem of democracy at the international level has attracted much attention (Zweifel 2006; Grigorescu 2015). In global democracy research, scholars have concentrated on the reform of the Security Council, on the representation of citizens (Archibugi 1993), and on the participation of civil society in the UN (Agné, Dellmuth, and Tallberg 2015). Interestingly, the discussion of member states' representation among the personnel of the UN has never been framed as a democratic issue. However, in public administration, representative bureaucracy scholars were the first to explain that making bureaucracies more representative of the population is a way to foster democratic government because bureaucracies lack direct accountability mechanisms with citizens. The same logic applies to IO bureaucracies: having nationals from all member states in the staff could be a way to "bring affected people into IO policymaking processes" (Dellmuth, Scholte, and Tallberg 2019, 634).

Geographical representation can also be *technocratic* as it can benefit the performance of international bureaucracies. As explained in the previous section, scholars studying representative bureaucracy in IOs have already conceptualized a "functional" or "performance" effect of bureaucratic representation. They have theorized that bureaucrats could bring knowledge about the institutional, cultural, and social characteristics of their country of origin to the IO, which could result in a more effective policy-making (Gravier 2013; Parízek 2017).

Finally, bureaucratic representation is an institutional feature that is also *fair* because it "gives equitable treatment to all concerned" (Dellmuth, Scholte, and Tallberg 2019, 635), which is something that representative bureaucracy scholars have for long argued (Coleman, Brudney, and Kellough 1998). In the context of IOs, passive representation has the potential to indicate equal opportunity, accessibility, and openness in the international civil service.

The Role of Bureaucratic Representation–Related Legitimation Practices

One of the major advancements in the literature on IO legitimacy has been to look at the "social practice of legitimation" (Zaum 2013a, 10) or, put differently, how legitimacy is managed (Suchman 1995; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016). This has led scholars to look at legitimation practices, that is, "where actors deliberately seek to make a political institution more legitimate, by boosting beliefs that its rule is exercised appropriately" (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 585). For instance, scholars have examined how IOs are (de)legitimized "from below" by a variety of actors such as non-state actors (Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019), citizens, and states' elite (Schmidtke 2019; Binder and Heupel 2020). The literature also shows that

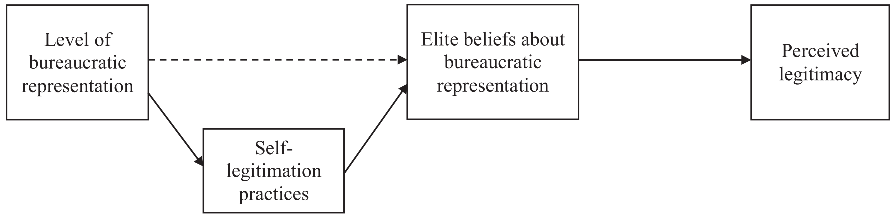

Figure 1. Theoretical framework.
Source: Adapted from Tallberg and Zürn (2019, 590).

IOs themselves are engaged in processes of self-legitimation that are "goal-oriented activities employed to establish and maintain a reliable basis of diffuse support for a political regime by its social constituencies" (Gronau and Schmidtke 2016, 540). Scholars have studied verbal legitimation activities (Dingwerth, Schmidtke, and Weise 2020) as well as non-verbal ones (Gronau 2016). Finally, IO self-legitimation can be directed toward external audiences but also vis-à-vis their own staff (von Billerbeck 2020).

The focus on legitimation practices is central to an empirical–sociological approach (Tallberg, Bäckstrand, and Scholte 2018b) to IO legitimacy because it implies a social process—an interaction—between the IO and relevant audiences. It sheds light on the fact that legitimacy beliefs do not happen in a vacuum but are embedded in a social context. The sociological approach to legitimacy aims to reveal the "processes through which those who are subject to rules grant or withhold legitimacy vis-à-vis global governance institutions" (Tallberg, Bäckstrand, and Scholte 2018a, 5). In this perspective, legitimacy beliefs result from an interactive and social process between the IO and its constituencies (Gronau and Schmidtke 2016). This article applies this logic to the study of bureaucratic representation in IOs.

Therefore, I conceive member states' beliefs about geographical representation as a dependent variable resulting from the "social process where individuals' priors interact with legitimation and delegitimation in producing an evaluation of IO features audiences care about" (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 590). This perspective acknowledges that elite beliefs about bureaucratic representation are related to the objective institutional feature of an IO (dotted arrow in figure 1), but that are also influenced and shaped by IO's self-legitimation practices that invoke these standards (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Therefore, in this article, I focus on both member states' beliefs about bureaucratic representation and IO legitimation practices in relation to this institutional feature (see figure 1).

Case Selection and Methods

Existing empirical studies on IO legitimacy are mainly quantitative in nature. For instance, scholars have used public opinion data (Johnson 2011; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015), survey experiments (Anderson, Bernauer, and Kachi 2019), and semiautomated content analysis (Binder and Heupel 2015; Schmidtke 2019) to assess the legitimacy beliefs of various IO constituencies such as citizens, nongovernmental organizations, and governmental elites. This article opts for a qualitative research strategy in order to understand the mechanisms through which an institutional feature—representative bureaucracy—can affect the perceived legitimacy of member states' representatives (i.e., diplomatic staff posted in permanent missions to the UN).

This article does so for the case of the largest administrative body of the UN family (in terms of staff size and budget): the UN Secretariat. The choice of the UN Secretariat case is mainly driven by the salience of the issue of geographic representation in this particular organization of the UN system. The issue of the representation of nationalities in the staff has been one of the most debated HR questions (Young 1970; Graham and Jordan 1980; Reymond 1983), and it is still the case nowadays. The UN international civil service, and especially the senior management level, suffers from regular critics of a lack of geographic diversity (McGreal 2015; Lynch 2020). Almost all resolutions of the UN General Assembly on HR management ask for more geographic diversity in these terms: "Reiterates its request to the Secretary-General to continue his ongoing effort to ensure the attainment of equitable geographical distribution in the Secretariat and to ensure as wide a geographical distribution of staff as possible in all departments and offices and at all levels, including at the Director and higher levels of the Secretariat" (United Nations 2013, 8).

The empirical analysis builds on qualitative material drawn from forty-six semistructured interviews with three different sets of actors in the UN Secretariat: member state representatives, HR experts, and staff members. To select member state representatives, I constructed a representative sample according to three criteria: the degree of representation (high–medium–low); inclusion of the main actors (security council members, main contributors to the budget); and geographic representativeness (all continents represented). I also interviewed key actors in the Department of Human Resources Management at the UN Secretariat. Finally, the staff members I interviewed belong to two offices of the UN Secretariat in New York operating in the field of peacebuilding. The empirical analysis is also based on the analysis of primary sources such as institutional archives and policy documents.

The interview questions were as general as possible to allow the respondents to elaborate as needed. For instance, the main questions were as follows: "As you may know, the principle of equitable geographic representation is enshrined in the UN Charter in article 101 al. 3. According to you, what is the justification for this principle?" and "How important is this principle to you? Why?." The interviews lasted from thirty minutes to more than one hour, were conducted in both English and French, and most were not recorded, which shows the sensitivity of the topic. I analyzed the interviews using thematic coding (Braun and Clarke 2006). The resulting categories were a mix of deductive and inductive coding (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). For instance, I used the three broad themes of democracy, fairness, and purposiveness according to the theoretical framework, but I was also open to other themes.

Geographical Representation–Related Legitimation Practices

The core tenant of my theoretical framework is that member states' beliefs about geographical representation are not (only) the direct product of their objective perceptions of the level of bureaucratic representation. They are an outcome of the interaction between member states' priors and IO's legitimation practices (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Thus, this section examines representative bureaucracy–related legitimation practices employed by the UN bureaucracy. The use of various practices shows that the UN Secretariat's management and staff members are aware of the abovementioned qualities and the legitimacy-related risks of being unrepresentative. In particular, I show that three types of practices are used: institutional, discursive, and behavioral (Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018). Institutional legitimation is the process through which IOs change their structures to send signals to specific audiences. For instance, institutional reforms are the most common legitimation practices used by IOs (Zaum 2013b). Discursive practices refer to the use of discourse and other communication channels to (de)legitimate entities. Behavioral practices include actions other than discourses or reforms that may affect audiences' perceptions, such as a country visit (Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018).

Bureaucratic Representation Policies (Institutional Practice)

The first legitimation practice that we can observe is the implementation of policies to monitor and foster geographic representation within the UN Secretariat (institutional practice). In the UN, the cornerstone of staffing policies regarding geographic representation is the system of desirable ranges established in 1948. Each year, a "desirable range" is set for each member state and computed according to a mathematical formula based on three criteria: budgetary contributions (55 percent), membership (40 percent), and population size (5 percent). Thus, this policy not only measures but also *quantifies* geographic representation. This distinction is important since the concept of quantification sheds light on the social and cognitive processes that transform words into numbers (Desrosières and Kott 2005). The sociology of quantification starts from the assumption that statistics—like other instruments used by the state—are more than "neutral, indispensable, unquestionable tools" (Desrosières 2008, 8). Furthermore, the system of desirable ranges constitutes the basis for all subsequent geographic representation policies. For instance, each year, the UN Secretariat organizes an exam—the Young Professional Programme (YPP)—open to nationals from un- and under-represented countries. In addition, the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) conducts outreach activities. This means that HR staff reach out to un- or under-represented member states when a position opens to ask them to submit a list of potential candidates (of course, this does not prevent citizens from other member states from applying and ultimately obtaining the job).[4] At the level of recruitment, the hiring manager should write a document record to support the recommendation of one candidate. This officer should justify its choice in terms of gender and country of origins and provide figures regarding geographic representation for the whole department to show the balance.

I argue that two dimensions constitute this legitimation practice. First, this policy is limited in scope and selective. It is thus important to question what is included and, above all, what is excluded in the system of desirable range. This system applies only to regular budget posts in the professional and higher categories. For instance, in 2018, the policy concerned 3,107 staff members out of 13,069 professional staff members (24 percent) and out of 37,5050 total staff members (8 percent) (United Nations 2019). Therefore, it assesses the UN Secretariat's geographic representativeness for only a very small number of posts. A second limitation is that the desirable range for each country is calculated without distinction between grades. As a diplomat noted, "We are in our range, I think we have 23 nationals, and our range is 20–30 but we have no one above P5 in Geneva and P4 in New York."[5] Actually, in terms of representation, it is very different to have twenty nationals at P2–P3 levels than to have them at the director level (D1/D2). However, for the overall system, the levels are all the same: the representation is twenty. This aggregated vision is advantageous for the UN Secretariat because it makes member states' levels of representation combinable (property of combinability), and it thus compares elements that are, in fact, different. In reality, in terms of representation, it is very different to have nationals at the level of directors than, for instance, to have them in more junior posts. The important idea here is commensuration (Espeland and Stevens 2008).

The second dimension of this legitimation practice is that all those policies pose little obligations on the recruitment process, as one UN staff member confessed: "But frankly and I definitely don't want to be quoted by name on this: it has absolutely no influence on any recruitment process. I have never had any recruitment process slow down or stop because a country was over-represented. Because we hired a German, an American, nobody ever stopped the recruitment processes on those grounds. So yes they are asking us to look at those things but there is no management decision coming from, they are not imposing on us."[6] This indicates that those policies are rather directed to external audiences—in particular member state representatives—in order to show that the secretary-general "does its best" and takes the issue of geographic representation seriously. The existence of these HR policies also dilutes the responsibility of UN's management for the level of geographic representation. Finally, the tool reduces the issue of geographic representation to numbers, which diminishes the political character of such representation. The following quotation summarizes this legitimation tool well: "At the end of the day, geographic diversity (. . .), it's only to satisfy member states' statistics."[7]

Reporting to Legitimize (Discursive Legitimation Practice)

Not only has the UN Secretariat developed policies to foster bureaucratic representation, but one important aspect of its legitimation effort has been to report on the progress made regarding geographic representation (discursive practice). In particular, I argue that the way (in terms of content and support) the UN Secretariat communicates about the geographic composition of its personnel constitutes a discursive legitimation practice. Two elements constitute this practice: first, the exclusion and inclusion of certain data in the statistics and second, how and when the UN Secretariat

[4] Interview with a member of the UN Secretariat Office of Human Resources Management, September 2019, via phone.

[5] Interview with a diplomat, January 2019, New York.

[6] Interview with a UN Secretariat staff member, December 2018, New York.

[7] Interview with a UN Secretariat staff member, May 2019, New York.

Annex

Comprehensive statistical tables

Table 1.A
All staff by nationality, gender, category and appointment type as at 30 June 2015

(Population: 41,081)

		P+			FS			G+			Totals				
Country of nationality	*Gender*	*PC*	*FT*	*TA*	*PC*	*FT*	*TA*	*PC*	*FT*	*TA*	*PC*	*FT*	*TA*	*Total*	*Percentage of all staff*
Afghanistan	**Female**	1	1	–	–	–	–	1	72	–	2	73	–	75	0.18
	Male	4	10	2	4	32	–	9	1 136	–	17	1 178	2	1 197	2.91
	All	5	11	2	4	32	–	10	1 208	–	19	1 251	2	1 272	3.10
Albania	**Female**	7	8	–	1	1	–	1	2	1	9	11	1	21	0.05
	Male	3	2	–	2	–	–	–	4	–	5	6	–	11	0.03
	All	10	10	–	3	1	–	1	6	1	14	17	1	32	0.08
Algeria	**Female**	5	3	2	–	–	–	6	9	–	11	12	2	25	0.06
	Male	5	12	3	–	1	–	9	7	1	14	20	4	38	0.09
	All	10	15	5	–	1	–	15	16	1	25	32	6	63	0.15
Andorra	**Female**	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Male	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	–	–	2	0.00
	All	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	–	–	2	0.00

Figure 2. Excerpt of the statistical tables.
Source: United Nations 2015, 59.

communicates on the geographical composition of the personnel.

As early as 1948, the General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General publish reports on the composition of its personnel on an annual basis. These reports are discussed each year during the sessions of the Fifth Committee. At the beginning, the reports were used to monitor the system of desirable ranges, but their scope has increased over time. These documents have become the main channel through which the Secretary-General communicates about the demographic makeup of the UN Secretariat. A first indication of the increased scope of these reports is their size. The first report, published in 1948, was 21 pages long, whereas the 2018 report was 141 pages. The following discussion focuses on the comprehensive statistical tables that are located at the end of these reports. Until 1976, statistics on nationality were provided only for posts subject to geographical distribution (i.e., less than 10 percent of the total UN Secretariat staff). Over the years, the scope of these statistics has expanded, but it is only since 2010 that statistics on nationality for all staff by category of service, appointment type, and gender are available. Figure 2 displays an excerpt of these statistical tables. For instance, women from Afghanistan represent 0.18 percent of all staff. On the second line of the last column, we can see that 2.9 percent of the staff of the UN Secretariat are Afghan men. The third line shows that the share of Afghan staff members (male and female) is 3.10 percent of all staff. What is interesting to note is that these tables provide the percentages of all staff by countries but not by categories of staff. One has to compute the shares of member states by category. I argue that this way of presenting statistics has the advantage of "dissolving" the representation in all the layers of the bureaucracy. For instance, according to this table, at first sight, one could say that there are more Afghans working at the UN (3.1 percent of the total staff) than Albanese (0.08 percent). However, Albania has more professional staff (twenty) than Afghanistan (eighteen). Therefore, even if these reports have become increasingly detailed over time, the Secretary-General presents data about nationality in a selective manner, that is, by providing percentages for the gender distribution only and not by categories of service.

In addition, the majority of member state representatives I interviewed were not aware of the exact number of their nationals working for the UN Secretariat. However, they knew the exact number of their nationals at the levels of the Under-Secretary-General (USG) and Assistant-Secretary-General (ASG). In fact, one group of international civil servants is widely visible to the global public—the senior management group that includes the heads of various departments and offices of the UN Secretariat and its funds and programs. There is a website with their pictures and names. When each name is clicked on, there is also a biography where the nationality of the person can be seen. For each appointment, the Secretary-General issues a press release in which he mentions the nationality of the person. For instance, all press releases start this way: "United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres announced today the appointment of Damilola Ogunbiyi *of Nigeria* as his Special Representative for Sustainable Energy for All and Co-Chair of United Nations-Energy."[8] So there has been a deliberate choice to communicate and give information on these political appointments on a regular basis because they are very sensitive and under member states' spotlight. My interpretation of this situation is that it successfully focuses the attention of member states on the upper level of the

[8]United Nations, "Secretary-General appoints Damilola Ogunbiyi of Nigeria Special Representation, Sustainable Energy for All." Available at https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sga1921.doc.htm, accessed August 30, 2021, emphasis added by the author.

Table 1. The qualities of geographical representation in IOs

Qualities	*Democratic*	*Fair*	*Technocratic*
Mechanisms	Participation Sense of ownership	Impartiality Equity between states	Diversity Linkage representation

bureaucracy where levels of geographic representation are satisfactory, which prevents them from looking at geographic diversity in the lower levels of the UN bureaucracy.

Exhibiting Geographical Representation (Behavioral Legitimation Practice)

Beyond statistics, reports, and press releases, there are other ways and channels for the UN Secretariat to send signals to member states and to communicate about the composition of the international civil service. I explain in this section that UN staff make sure to exhibit passive representation during daily interactions with member state representatives. This last legitimation practice is thus behavioral.

It has been said that "the international civil service is the vehicle through which the United Nations interact with the world" (Langrod 1963). Like for public administrations at the national level, the personnel of the UN Secretariat constitute the interface between the organization and its constituency and beneficiaries/clients. As one diplomat recognized, "they [the staff] are the faces of the organization."[9] Staff members at the UN Secretariat have daily or at least weekly interactions with diplomats, especially in headquarter cities such as New York and Geneva, during meetings and official events, for instance. What is very interesting is that the staff members I interviewed are aware of the importance of staff's geographic composition, and they strategically use the composition of the team/group to impact member states' beliefs when—as they say—they "go out." The citations below are very demonstrative of this, since the word "to show" is used many times:

> Geographical diversity is also needed to be well perceived, there is a political aspect, *showing* that the section is diverse not even for your own member state but for other member states.[10]

> When we go out and the political department being the political department it is the subject of a lot of contestation. We need to be able *to show* the member states that we are impartial, we represent the world in the department, that we are not the tool or the instrument of anyone or area of the world. Because that's the impression that many have.[11]

This last quote also reveals that the need is not equally experienced by all departments and that some are more exposed than others. The use of these legitimation practices demonstrates that UN senior leadership and staff members are aware of the symbolic importance of geographic representativeness. Taken together, these three practices aim to show member states that the organization takes seriously this issue and "does its best" to foster geographic representativeness. The next section turns to the beliefs of the targeted groups: member state representatives.

[9] Interview with a diplomat, May 2017, Geneva.

[10] Interview with a UN Secretariat staff member, February 2019, New York.

[11] Interview with a UN Secretariat staff member, February 2019, New York.

Elite's Beliefs about Geographical Representation

Interviews with diplomats, staff members, and HR experts allowed to understand why geographical representation in IOs is perceived as democratic, fair, and technocratic by member state representatives. The various mechanisms are summarized in table 1. In addition, I was also able to grasp how diplomats "react" to some legitimation practices described above.

The Democratic Quality of Bureaucratic Representation: Fostering Member States' Participation and Sense of Ownership

Participation is a key element for democratic governance in IOs (Grigorescu 2015). As former SG Boutros Boutros-Ghali wrote: "Democracy within the family of nation means the application of its principles within the world Organization itself. This requires the fullest consultation, participation and engagement of all States, large and small, in the work of the Organization" (United Nations 1992). Based on interviews conducted with diplomats, we can understand that participation is equally important for small and large states, but they use different narratives to justify their participation.[12]

For the representatives of powerful states (for instance, the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan), bureaucratic representation is important in relation to their budgetary contribution levels. Since they contribute greatly to the budget, they also want to participate in administrative activities, and in the projects, they directly fund through voluntary contributions. One way to participate is to have their nationals working at the UN.[13] For small- to medium-sized states, the narrative regarding participation is based on their status as members of the organization, which grants them the right to participate in the internal affairs of the international bureaucracy, illustrated by this quotation: "Rich countries should not say—on the basis that they give more—that the others are only here to accompany them."[14] Therefore, in addition to a mere "return on investment" argument,[15] it is important to have a representative international civil service to ensure what Krislov (1974) called functional participation.

In addition to a sense of participation, bureaucratic representation also contributes to building and reinforcing a sense of ownership toward the organization. In interviews, member state representatives and staff members repeatedly describe member states as the *owners* of the UN.[16] Therefore, bureaucratic representation is seen as a tool to reinforce member states' identification with the

[12] I am aware of the limitations that come with this categorization of "small" versus "big" states. That said, on the topic of staff diversity, there are clearly different groups of states. The first group is made of powerful states at the UN that can be operationalized as being part of the P5 and the top ten contributors. I will refer to these as "big states." On the other hand, the group of "small states" includes countries with low contribution levels that have few nationals among UN staff.

[13] Interviews with diplomats, April 2017, Geneva.

[14] Interview with a member state's permanent representative, May 2017, Geneva.

[15] Interview with a diplomat, May 2017, Geneva.

[16] Interviews with member states' permanent representatives, June 2017 and January 2019, Geneva and New York, respectively.

organization,[17] which is perceived to be important for the "long-term survival of the organization."[18]

The Fairness Quality of Bureaucratic Representation: Fulfilling the Principle of Equity between States and Fostering (the Perception of) Impartiality

The UN is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all member states, as stated in the preamble of the Charter: "We the people of the United Nations [are] determined (. . .) to reaffirm faith (. . .) in the equal rights of men and women *and of nations large and small*" (United Nations 1945). Therefore, in theory, all members of the UN are equal and are entitled the same duties and benefits derived from membership. In particular, all member states should have equal access to employment in the UN organizations. As one might expect, reality looks quite different, and citizens from member states do not have equal opportunities for a variety of reasons that have been extensively described in the literature (Novosad and Werker 2019; Badache 2020; Eckhard and Steinebach 2021; Parizek and Stephen 2021).

Despite this situation, member state representatives firmly believe that "all states have the right to have their nationals in the staff"[19] because "it is the idea behind the UN: equality."[20] That being said, member states are aware of this structural inequality, and they are not asking for equality but rather for equity. As an ambassador regretfully noted, "I think there will never be equality, we have to live with it, but at least equity."[21] He continued, "We cannot say that a country like the Congo should have as much as the UK or the US, which contribute a lot to the budget, but we should have our place in the system. It is not the case in most of UN organizations. Not only for Congo but for many developing countries."[22]

Another aspect of the "equal opportunity" dimension of representative bureaucracy in IOs is that, according to several interviewees, the UN should be a model employer. It was stated in many interviews that the UN should strive to remedy these inequalities or at least not reproduce them in its own staff composition.[23] However, as of today, the unequal access to employment that appears in the figures on staff composition is negatively perceived by several member states. Taking this structural inequality between states seriously and trying to rectify it by fostering bureaucratic representation will help the UN abide by the principle of equality.

A second mechanism through which bureaucratic representation is perceived as fair is that it fosters the perception of impartiality of the international civil service. The literature on international bureaucracies is very clear on the relation between impartiality and perceived legitimacy: "The need to be seen as impartial servants of state members is crucial in the UN Secretariat's behavior" (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 21). Impartiality is the core value of the international civil service as set out in the UN Charter and staff regulations. It is strongly related to the concept of independence, according to which the international civil service should be free from the influence of member states. But how can impartiality be ensured? From the interviews, we can see that balanced geographical representation within the staff can be a means to foster (the perception of) impartiality. As one staff member noted, "Also if you present an office that sort of, represents the world, it feeds in the sense you are not biased (. . .) the US State Department is not driving your agenda if you have your staff coming from everywhere."[24] The same idea is put forward by HR experts: "It's true that an organization that would be composed of only five member states among the 193 could be perceived as being dominated by these five member states and as losing its neutrality or its capacity to treat equally all member states."[25]

Beyond symbolism, having a representative workforce allows thus the UN to have a balanced set of opinions and perspectives that may eventually result in unbiased policymaking (substantive impartiality): "Above all, we do not want that a country or a group of countries take control of our policies so that our vision would reflect only the interests of one group of countries."[26]

The Technocratic Quality of Bureaucratic Representation: Linkage Representation and Diversity

All interviewees perceive that geographical representation is needed for a responsive and performant policy-making in IOs.[27] Two mechanisms seem to be at play, which are well summarized by this quotation: "You need to have a manner of communicating in a horizontal way with Member States and for that diversity is extremely important because you are an international organization not a regional company, you need to depend on diversity to understand the world interaction, to deal with Member States, to be sensible because there is a possibility that a staff full of Scandinavians will never understand the needs of Ethiopia or Soudan or Latin America."[28]

On the one hand, broader geographical representation allows to gather relevant information, thematic expertise, and knowledge from various national contexts as this quotation illustrates: "You know these institutions make policies at different levels. If we take the example of migration. Today Western countries are not concerned by refugees, it is mostly countries from the South. But when we have to deal with this issue, the sensibility of impacted countries is stronger than those of who have heard about it in the newspapers. No, I think that developing countries have their contribution to make in the functioning of the UN, in the elaboration of policies, and even in their implementation. Not to have them in the staff is a lack, a lack that can have consequences."[29] The idea here is that international bureaucrats bring language and (informal) knowledge about the country or region of origin to the bureaucracy (Eckhard 2021). More specifically, this experience includes knowledge that cannot be learned or that "cannot [be found] on Google."[30] This informal knowledge brought by more geographical representation is used at headquarters in order to develop

[17] Interview with a diplomat, May 2017, Geneva

[18] Interview with a member state permanent representative, May 2017, Geneva.

[19] Interview with a staff member of the UN Secretariat, December 2018, New York; interviews with member states representatives, September and October 2016, via phone.

[20] Interview with a staff member of the UN Secretariat, December 2018, New York.

[21] Interview with a member state's permanent representative, May 2017, Geneva.

[22] Interview with a member state's permanent representative, May 2017, Geneva.

[23] Interviews with staff members at the UN Secretariat, December 2018 and January 2019, New York.

[24] Interview with a UN Secretariat staff member, December 2018, New York.

[25] Interview with a human resource expert, June 2019, New York.

[26] Interview with a UN Secretariat staff member, May 2019, New York.

[27] Interviews with diplomats, New York and Geneva.

[28] Interview with a member state's representative, May 2018, Geneva.

[29] Interview with a diplomat.

[30] Interview with a permanent representative, April 2017, Geneva.

policies that reflect the local contexts. Actually, it was one of the justifications for the implementation of the system of desirable ranges: "(. . .) the policies and administrative methods of the Secretariat should reflect and profit to the highest degree from, assets of various cultures and the technical competence of all member nations" (United Nations 1947). A diverse international civil service can be used to take into account national circumstances in the development of policies and serve as a "sounding board" (Lemoine 1995). Taken together with language, it allows the staff to be culturally sensitive.[31]

The second mechanism is that increased geographical representation brings more diversity among UN staff. The interviewees' discourse strongly corroborated the information and decision-making perspective in organizational psychology, according to which diversity brings a wide range of perspectives and experiences to the table, which will enhance creativity and innovation. The following quotation illustrates this point: "We are a small team. We are seven people here. Of course, it's very important, and I believe that diversity also multiplies what I called the solution factor. Certainly, having one brain over a solution is good, but having 10 brains is better. Now having 10 brains with different (national) backgrounds over a solution I think that brings even another layer of succeeding with a proposed solution."[32] This mechanism is different from the previous one as it based on the principle of integration whereas linkage representation is based on differentiation that is when bureaucrats contribute to policy-making because they can bring knowledge about their country of origin.

We can see from this analysis of states elites' beliefs about geographical representation is that they often refer to the legitimation practices employed by the bureaucracy. In particular, the institutional policies—the system of desirable ranges—was constantly mentioned by the diplomats interviewed when they referred to "their" level of representation.

Conclusion

The central objective of this article was to unpack an often-cited theoretical link between bureaucratic representation and the perceived legitimacy of IOs. I have argued that we should look at states' elite beliefs about geographical representation and legitimation practices in order to better understand this relationship. From the analysis of legitimation practices, we can see that the UN Secretariat dedicates many resources to signal to member states that the organization takes the issue of geographical representation seriously. Three legitimation practices are used by the bureaucracy to shape diplomats' beliefs. First, the UN has created a formula that sets targets and monitors the geographical composition of its personnel (institutional practice). Second, the Secretary-General communicates about the composition of the UN Secretariat's workforce (discursive practice). Third, UN staff make sure to show member states during meetings or events that they are passively representative (behavioral practice). The second part of the empirical analysis showed why member states' elite care about bureaucratic representation. Bureaucratic representativeness is perceived as being a democratic, purposive, and fair institutional feature.

These findings make three contributions. First, it contributes to the empirical study of IO legitimacy by looking at sources and legitimation practices in relation to the bureaucracies of IOs, which has been neglected so far in the IO legitimacy literature. Second, it adds to recent studies applying the theory of representative bureaucracy to IOs by providing empirical evidence on key variables: legitimation practices and elite beliefs of geographical representation. Finally, this research contributes to the literature on representative bureaucracy by shedding light on several mechanisms through which passive representation can affect legitimacy beliefs and by showing that representative bureaucracy can be used strategically by public organizations in order to foster their legitimacy.

However, these results regarding the link between perceived legitimacy and bureaucratic representation should not displace the importance of politics when it comes to staffing in IOs, which many scholars have rightly emphasized. The key argument of this article is that member states grant legitimacy to an IO not only because they are represented among the IO's staff, which allows them to access material benefits (information, prestige, etc.), but also because they value the fact that the IO is geographically representative. It is true that it is very difficult to say under which conditions member states grant "genuine legitimacy," i.e., "for reasons other than their expectation that it will do good things for them and their world" (Hurd 2019, 722), and under which conditions they comply because they are represented in IO staff, that is, their interests are satisfied. In other words, to what extent are states' legitimacy beliefs driven by their own representation among IO staff? This article cannot answer this question but acknowledges the political dimension of legitimacy. One way to answer this question would be to conduct survey experiments during which, for instance, the researcher would be able to manipulate the levels of representation.

Finally, this study has some limitations. First, this article focused on the mechanisms in the representative bureaucracy–legitimacy relationship and reveals nothing about the effect of representative bureaucracy on perceived legitimacy from a covariational perspective. This would have required a different research design. Therefore, the next step would be to provide evidence of the effect of bureaucratic representation on perceived legitimacy, using survey experiments for instance. Second, this study was limited to the study of member states' legitimacy beliefs in relation to bureaucratic representation. Future research should move beyond member states as the sole audience of IO legitimacy (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). In the context of representative bureaucracy, another relevant audience could be constituted by the beneficiaries of IO activities beyond "elite governments," that is, citizens of the countries where IOs have operational activities. The third potential limitation is that this study focused only on one case: the UN Secretariat. Regarding the topic of geographic representativeness, it can be said that the UN secretariat is a typical case. First, it shares with other UN organizations the same organizational structure and staffing rules.[33] Regarding the variable that is under scrutiny in this research—geographical representation—the Secretariat of the UN is not different from other UN system organizations in terms of patterns.[34] In terms of policies, the Secretariat is not the only one that has put in place a system of "flexible quotas." Other organizations have explicit formulas such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The second common element to all UN organizations is the political constituency. All these

[31] Interviews with UN Secretariat staff members and with UN HR experts.

[32] Interview with a UN Secretariat staff member, February 2019, New York.

[33] These rules are developed by the International Civil Service Commission.

[34] This following discussion is based on several exploratory interviews made with HR directors in several UN system organizations.

organizations are universal and share the same membership. It means that my interviews with diplomats would be also valid for other organizations. There is little to suggest that diplomats' perspectives on geographic representation in the Secretariat would be different from another organization. One of the main differences of the UN Secretariat is the likely higher degree of politicization than other UN organizations because of its central role in the UN system. To expand our knowledge on the link between legitimation and bureaucratic representation in IOs, it would be interesting to adopt a temporal and cross-organizational perspective.

To conclude this article, one must not forget that the quest for legitimacy does not come without costs (Agné and Söderbaum 2022). Organizations sometimes change their structure to maintain their legitimacy but that can lead to a dysfunctional behavior (Meyer and Rowan 1977). In some cases, geographical representativeness could be fostered at the expenses of effectiveness. For instance, if we think of a situation where a bureaucrat is recruited "because of" his or her nationality rather than based on his or her competences. Therefore, the puzzle between performance, legitimacy, and bureaucratic representation in (international) public organizations would be worth examining further. How IOs reconcile performance and legitimacy needs would consist in a research agenda in itself.

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